URBAN DESIGN

HAMILTON, OHIO
COMPRENEHSIVE PLAN

VISION 2020 UPDATE

URBAN DESIGN

LONG-TERM GOAL:

The City should adopt policies, programs, design concepts and regulations that promote and enhance the visual, built and natural environments that contribute to Hamilton's "livable" character and its reputation as a dynamic City with an established sense of place.

INTRODUCTION:

Perhaps the most important elements to quality urban design in a community are through Smart Growth policies and how they apply to our visual, built and natural environment. This document is designed to serve as Hamilton's urban design roadmap for the next 20 years. The urban design section is not static but must recognize current trends and changes in the local and regional economy that will impact the future of the region and the City of Hamilton. The Urban Design information contained in this section should establish much of the framework for the City of Hamilton to be a Sustainable/Regional Hub in the Cincinnati - Dayton Metroplex through smart growth concepts contained within this Comprehensive Plan.

The following is a list of policy and planning tools referred to as Smart Growth to build sustainable communities:

- Build new neighborhoods in a compact form
- Connect street systems that are designed to balance auto, pedestrian, and bicycle movement
- Maintain and enhance existing infrastructure
- Actively pursue redevelopment, including infill residential development
- Encourage mixed-use development, preferably near transit service
- Connect open spaces, parks, and trails into a system
- Vigorously protect sensitive habitat and watershed land
- Build mixed-density and mixed-income housing
- Recognize traditional downtowns and urban neighborhoods as being a critical anchor for the economic and community vitality of a region
- Promote stabile neighborhood schools as a focal point for all adults, children, civic groups, and businesses
- Establish predictability in the development process; development projects that enhance the economy, the community, and the environment receive expedited approval (Fleissig and Jacobsen p. 4)

The City of Hamilton's Comprehensive Plan is designed to follow these Smart Growth tools to guide the City in creating a sustainable community through its urban design policies, objectives and actions. In conjunction with the above listed Smart Growth Tools, the City of Hamilton's Comprehensive Plan and Urban Design Section will include key components of the Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana (OKI) Regional Council of Governments Strategic Regional Policy Plan and other information to support key urban design policies. The OKI ideas utilized within the plan are italicized and documented.

POLICIES STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Overall Objectives:

Section 8.1

A. The Comprehensive Plan serves as a guide for the promotion of high quality and livable built environments that will promote and enhance the City of Hamilton's image through urban design that is integrated into transportation, public facilities, housing, education, economic development, and the environment.

B. Ensure that the City of Hamilton's Comprehensive Plan is consistent with the OKI Strategic Regional Policy Plan.

C. Hamilton should strive to direct the development of the physical environment so that it is conducive to retaining and attracting residents, commercial establishments and industrial uses. The City's physical environment conveys a visual image in terms of its design, character, and organization that can either be clear, logical and attractive or cluttered, confused and disorganized. The design, location and maintenance of individual elements such as roads, parking lots, pedestrian spaces, site furnishings, signing, open space, parks and planting affect the quality of the visual environment. Each of these elements should be functional, attractive and harmonious with its surroundings to create environments that are attractive and foster pride within the community.

D. The objective of these design considerations is to provide overall guidance for improving the quality of the visual environment at the City's entry points, along transportation corridors, within neighborhood areas and within the retail, service, office and industrial districts of the City.

Buildings and Structures

Section 8.2

OBJECTIVES

A. The City of Hamilton should ensure that buildings and structures are designed in such a way as to add value to the surrounding community. “First we shape our buildings, then they shape us.” – Winston Churchill

B. Enhance the visual image of the City of Hamilton for residents and visitors alike through application of effective urban design practices and procedures in buildings and structures within the community.

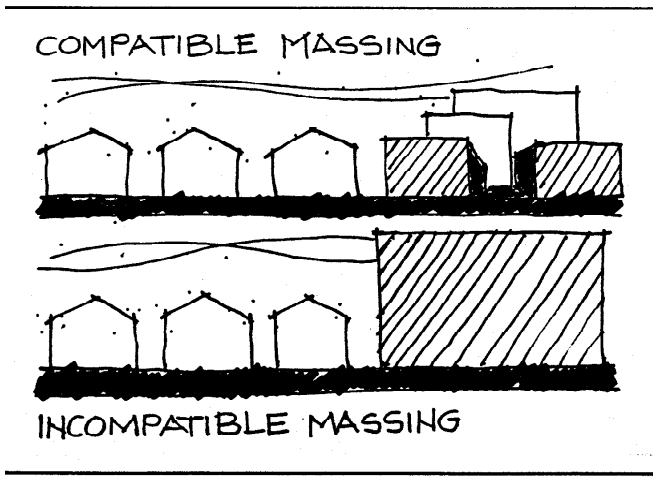
C. Promote and enhance the present attractive design elements in neighborhoods and business districts and augment them in ways that emphasize intimacy, human scale and human interaction.

Examples of Urban Design Elements

STRATEGIES

In order to meet the objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan's Urban Design Section, the following strategies should be pursued by the City of Hamilton:

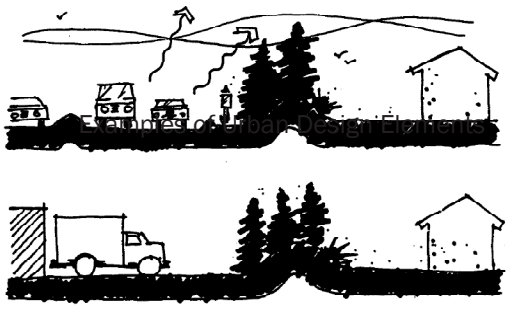
- Site Planning: The image of Hamilton is largely determined by the design, character, and siting of its buildings and support facilities. The site planning design process must go beyond the need to satisfy the functional requirements of a facility. Site planning design should strive to achieve an ordered sense of place, logically relating to its surrounding environment while providing an attractive setting for its intended activities.
- Mass of Buildings: The massing of a building refers to its overall bulk, or the volume of space that the building encloses. When massing a new building, the size and proportion of its exterior envelope and elevations should be designed to relate compatibly with adjacent structures. A large facility can be made to better relate to existing smaller facilities by dividing its mass into smaller components that create a building elevation that is more compatible or complementary, in terms of its size and proportions, to the adjacent structures. This goal is accomplished by manipulating the configuration of the floor plan and/or building height to break down the mass of the building into smaller elements (Illustration 1).
- Form: A building's form is an articulation of its basic mass and is characterized by both shape and silhouette that should be compatible with adjacent buildings. The size and proportion of a building's elevations and its roof are the primary form-giving characteristics that are important in relating a new building to its setting.



- Open Space: Create outdoor open spaces between buildings that relate structures together and convey an appropriate scale, character and quality for their intended use. Use buildings and planting as elements of spatial enclosures to visually define and contain outdoor space. The degree of enclosure that is conveyed is determined by the type and number of containing sides that define the space, their distance apart and their height.
- Circulation and Parking: Provide direct pedestrian connections to buildings. Locate all building loading docks off-street and out-of-sight of main roadways and building entrances; employ appropriate fencing and/or planting to screen loading docks from adjacent buildings or areas. Provide attractive and convenient parking by coordinating all parking that serves the group of buildings. Provide common access to several parking areas to avoid having a high number of individual driveways opening onto roadways.
- Site Edges: Provide appropriate and consistent landscape edge planting between off-street parking facilities and main roadways, between pedestrian and vehicular-oriented areas, between different building groupings and land use areas. Use plant materials as a transition or edge treatment between compatible adjacent facilities or to define and channel pedestrian traffic along a walkway. Use a dense evergreen buffer area or planted earth-berms for site edges where visual screening is needed, such as between visually incompatible facilities and land use areas or between parking areas and a building or street.

An example of related open space

An example of out-of-sight parking behind a building



Examples of Site Edges

- "According to CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment), determination of whether a building is well designed should be based on the following five criteria:
  - Appearance. The building itself should be excellent and appropriate to its surroundings, attracting a favorable response from users, customers, and the wider public.
  - Context. The project should be seen as a place, not as an isolated building, and should include creation of public space, contribution to the neighborhood and its environment, and consideration of the impact on transportation patterns.
  - Buildability. The project should involve ease of construction, use of materials from sustainable sources, prefabrication, and use of standard components.
  - Maintenance. The design should reduce energy use, and cleaning and repair costs—all estimated over the life of the building.
  - Operation. The design should provide for efficient use of space, ease of navigation around the building, comfort of users, flexibility, effectiveness of service, and accessibility." (Sallette)

ACTIONS

A. The City of Hamilton should review it current codes and determine the appropriate modifications and additions that can address the visual and aesthetic problems including the folloving conditions.
   - Poor visual quality due to lack of consistent application of planning principles resulting in incompatible and even chaotic development patterns between facilities and areas.
   - The spatial demands of automobile parking and circulation dominate many building settings.
   - Architectural incompatibility between new, existing and rehabilitated buildings.
   - Space between existing buildings has been considered "left over" space without appropriate treatment.
   - Lack of or crumbed curbing results in poorly defined roadway edges resulting in a worn and tired perception.
   - Deteriorated asphalt curbs present an unmaintained appearance and an overall poor visual image.
   - Poor drainage resulting in standing water along roadways, impassable walkways and an unmaintained look.
   - Lack of street tree plantings in major transportation corridors.
   - Lack of setback, screening and edge treatment to enhance parking lot aesthetics.
   - Unrestricted views of overhead utility lines.
   - Unrestricted views of service areas.
   - Lack of pedestrian circulation.
   - Lack of plant material in large parking lots.

B. The City of Hamilton should explore the Construction Industry Council (CIC) and Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE) models and other resources to determine the best way to quantify the economic cost and benefits for buildings and structures.

C. The City of Hamilton should develop and fund a façade improvement grant program.

Landscaping and Streetscapes

Section 8.3

OBJECTIVES

A. Encourage the creation of a sense of place in various locations in Hamilton through application of urban design techniques that combine distinctive signage/graphics with landscaped public and open space and a variety of other visual amenities. Locations where these techniques should be applied include the following:

- Major entry points into the City
- Transportation Corridors
- Entry/focal points in a variety of business districts and neighborhoods

Examples of quality signage

An example of tree landscaping for streets

STRATEGIES

In order to meet the objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan's Urban Design Section, the following strategies should be pursued by the City of Hamilton:

- Streetscape Improvements: Pavement, curb and gutters, underground utilities, sidewalks, street trees, street lighting and signage are all elements that should be used to improve a roadway's appearance. The appearance of roadways can be greatly improved by reducing streetscape clutter such as overhead power lines, undefined roadway edges and un-maintained/damaged plant materials. The use of common materials and colors, location and treatment of parking areas and the addition of landscape plantings are all important factors in creating a coordinated appearance. Consider street tree plantings as one of the simplest and most effective means of improving the visual quality of the community's streetscape.
- Signage: Signage throughout a community can greatly influence the visual quality of a community. Communities across the country are taking steps to insure that signage is safe and efficient and adds to the visual environment.
- Trees: "...cities with more trees need fewer stormwater facilities and can reduce air pollution more cheaply. And using the ecosystem services that trees provide means it costs less to run a city-and creates one whose citizens are healthier. Trees can also help cities avoid expensive fines for noncompliance with Environmental Protection Agency standards." (News from the World of Trees)
  "Cities are starting to treat trees less as decoration and more like public utilities now that they can calculate how much money trees save by cutting air pollution, storm runoff and energy costs." (Nasser)

ACTIONS

A. The City of Hamilton should explore the Construction Industry Council (CIC) and Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE) models and other resources to determine the best way to quantify the economic cost and benefits of landscaping and streetscapes.

B. The City of Hamilton should review its currents codes and make appropriate modifications for landscaping/streetscaping and signage. These changes should be based on sound economic and environmental data.

Various Examples of Street Improvement

Public Space and Environment

Section 8.4

OBJECTIVES

A. Ensure that public space is designed to provide social and economic benefits to the City of Hamilton and its citizens.

B. The overall objectives of planting are to improve the physical and psychological well being of people who live and work in the community. The specific objectives of planting can be stated as:

- Enhancement: Existing trees, forestlands and detail planting features are important resources and visual assets that should be carefully preserved and enhanced for functional as well as aesthetic uses.
- Improve the Overall Visual Quality: Aesthetic and functional applications of appropriate plant materials should be properly recognized and employed to help improve the landscape character of urban areas. This objective includes: harmoniously blending the built with the natural environment; providing scale and comfort to pedestrian environments; visually reinforcing the hierarchy of the road network; screening unsightly views or elements; and buffering incompatible land uses.
- Environmental Quality: Better use should be made of plant materials for environmental quality and energy conservation. Plants can be effectively used in a variety of environmental applications including soil erosion control, air purification, noise abatement, and climate modification.
- Economic Impact: Plantings and landscaping associated with public areas can add economic value to a community.

STRATEGIES

In order to meet the objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan's Urban Design Section, the following strategies should be pursued by the City of Hamilton:

- Planting design is sometimes misconceived as a means of providing only decoration or ornamentation, while ignoring the many functional uses.
- Communities are using LEED regulations to effectively address environmental concerns related to development.
- "For a place, CABE says evaluation should include the following seven criteria:
  - Character. Townscapes and landscapes should respond to and reinforce locally distinctive patterns of development and culture.
  - Continuity and enclosure. Projects should promote continuity of street frontages and enclosure of space through clearly defined private and public areas.
  - Quality of the public realm. Public spaces and routes should be attractive, safe, uncluttered, and work effectively for all in society, including disabled and elderly people.

— Ease of movement. Accessibility and local permeability should be promoted through creation of places that connect with each other and that are easy to move through, putting the emphasis on people rather than traffic, and integrating land uses and transit.
— Legibility. Recognizable routes, intersections, and landmarks should be provided to help people find their way around.
— Adaptability. Developments should respond to changing social, technological, and economic conditions.
— Diversity. Developments should provide choice with a mix of compatible projects and uses that work together to create viable places that respond to local needs." (Sallette)

ACTIONS

A. The City should actively protect and promote Hamilton's historic and cultural heritage in residential neighborhoods and business districts based on positive visual elements found in local architecture, monuments and open space.

B. The City of Hamilton should explore the Construction Industry Council (CIC) and Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE) models and other resources to determine the best way to quantify the economic cost and benefits of good environmental design and quality public space.

C. The City of Hamilton should adopt LEED concepts and practices into its codes and ordinances.

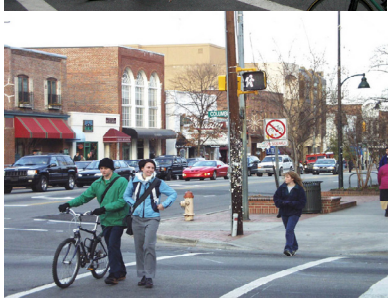
Transportation and Connectivity

Section 8.5

OBJECTIVES

A. Promote pedestrian mobility between and through neighborhoods and business districts via:

- — A network of pedestrian walks, corridors, greenways and bike trails
- — Marked crosswalks, wheelchair accessible ramps, adequate sidewalks, etc.
- — Roadway easements and marked lanes as required to "share the road" with bicyclists
- — Pedestrian-oriented amenities such as street furniture, lighting, fountains, landscape treatments, public art, visual amenities and mini-parks



From Top to Bottom:

Top photo provided by www.pedbikeimages.org / Dan Burden.
Middle photo provided by www.pedbikeimages.org / Patrick David Barber.
Bottom photo provided by www.pedbikeimages.org / Robert Schneider.

- "Pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use centers are more successful by virtually every measure: rental rates for apartments and for office and retail space, sales prices for residential units, sales and tax revenues, hotel-room occupancy rates, and property values. Overall, per-square-foot rates for retail and residential rents in mixed-use town center developments are 20 to 50 percent higher, absorption is two to four times faster, and appreciation is two to three times faster." (Schmitz and Scully 64). "Research has established that people who live in pedestrian-oriented areas generally walk more and are healthier than people who live in areas where walking is difficult. A 2003 study, for example, found that after controlling for demographic factors, increases in urban sprawl were linked to increase in weight. (For this study, sprawl was defined in terms of low residential density, the absence of mixed land uses, the lack of a definable center, and inaccessible streets.) The study also found, as noted earlier, that residents of the county with the highest levels of sprawl were six pounds (2.7 kilograms) heavier than those who lived in the county with the lowest levels of sprawl." (Schmitz and Scully p. 14)
- "The goal is not to eliminate vehicular traffic but to tame it. Pedestrians and bicyclists can navigate easily when traffic moves at slow speeds. Two ways to calm traffic are to narrow roadways and to shorten the distances between intersections." (Schmitz and Scully p. 37)

STRATEGIES

In order to meet the objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan's Urban Design Section, the following strategies should be pursued by the City of Hamilton:

- The street system in Hamilton provides not only a primary means of access, but also a primary vantage point along which people view the community. Although the existing road network may be difficult to change because of land uses, buildings and utilities, much can be done to visually improve the road network.
- All new or renovated intersections should be designed to provide safe and efficient movement for both pedestrian and vehicular traffic.
- Complex intersections should be avoided in new intersection design and corrected where existing. These include intersections with skewed approaches, jogged alignments or with more than four approaches. These types of intersections create safety hazards, decrease traffic flow capacity and contain unsightly large expanses of paving. Roundabouts should be considered at these locations to "calm" traffic and provide opportunities for urban design elements.
- All intersections should be marked with crosswalks and stop stripes. Turning radii should vary with facility needs. All corners of the intersection should contain curb cuts for handicapped access.
- Roadway structures, such as bridges and guardrails, must be designed for function, safety, economy and visual impact. These structures play an important role in determining visual image.

ACTIONS

A. The City of Hamilton should review its thoroughfare/transportation plan and determine where upgrades and modifications to the city's transportation infrastructure are needed.

B. The City of Hamilton should research and adopt the most appropriate model(s) that can best calculate the connection between transportation and land use development.

C. The City should adopt regulations that will facilitate design concepts to help integration pedestrian, bicycle, transit and vehicle systems into the city in a way that adds economic and social value to the community.

Housing

Section 8.6

OBJECTIVES

A. Encourage and promote new residential developments in various locations that feature mixed use, single family and multi family developments that maximizes the current infrastructure of roads, schools and public facilities. This will help the citizen's of the City of Hamilton to realize the greatest return on investments.

ACTIONS

A. The City of Hamilton should understand the desires and needs of the aging baby boomers, and households without children and ensure that residential environments are created to serve this growing sector of the population.

B. Determine what design principles will have the greatest effect on creating sustainable housing for all income levels for the City of Hamilton and adopt these principles into city regulations.

STRATEGIES

In order to meet the objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan's Urban Design Section, the following strategies should be pursued by the City of Hamilton:

- "A good public landscape also offers very clear benefits to the local economy in terms of stimulating increased house prices, since house-buyers are willing to pay to be near green space." (CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment), The Value of Public Space: How high quality parks and public spaces create economic, social and environmental value p.4)
- "Shifting demographic trends are further strengthening the demand for walkable environments. In particular, the aging of the baby boomers and a decrease in the number of households with children are fueling a shift in demand away from conventional suburban developments." (Schmitz and Scully p. 63)
- "But today, families with a breadwinner father and stay-at-home mother account for barely 10 percent of all households. By 2000, married couples with children represented only 23.5 percent of all households..." (Schmitz and Scully p. 63)

Examples of Quality Housing Design

Economic Value of Urban Design

Section 8.7

OBJECTIVES

A. Determine what urban design principles offer the most economic value and improvement to quality of life.

B. Research other communities that have implemented these urban design principles and determine their economic and quality of life benefits to those communities.

C. Understand the process that these communities went through to turn the concept into reality.

STRATEGIES

In order to meet the objectives outlined in the Comprehensive Plan's Urban Design Section, the following strategies should be pursued by the City of Hamilton:

- "A high-quality public environment can have a significant impact on the economic life of urban centres big or small, and is therefore an essential part of any successful regeneration strategy. As towns increasingly compete with one another to attract investment, the presence of good parks, squares, gardens and other public spaces becomes a vital business and marketing tool: companies are attracted to locations that offer well-designed, well-managed public places and these in turn attract customers, employees and services." (CABE [Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment], The Value of Public Space: How high quality parks and public spaces create economic, social and environmental value p.4)
- "Investment in design can add value in the form of direct benefits to those responsible for the investment, as well as in indirect benefits to society and others." (Sallette)
- "The economic costs and benefits of good design can be understood in the context of a value-added investment model developed by CIC." (Sallette)

ACTIONS

A. The City of Hamilton should explore the Construction Industry Council (CIC) and Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE) models and other resources to determine the best way to quantify the economic cost and benefits of good urban design.

B. The City of Hamilton should determine which items from the CIC and CABE models and other resources are of the most value to the community and implement these items into the City's codes and regulations.

Examples of Good Design and Strong Economic Activity

ACTION STEPS

Buildings and Structures:

A. The City of Hamilton should review it current codes and determine the appropriate modifications and additions that can address the items listed below.

Typical visual and aesthetic problems in Hamilton include the following conditions:

- Poor visual quality due to lack of consistent application of planning principles resulting in incompatible and even chaotic development patterns between facilities and areas.
- The spatial demands of automobile parking and circulation dominate many building settings.
- Architectural incompatibility between new, existing and rehabilitated buildings.
- Space between existing buildings has been considered “left over” space without appropriate treatment.
- Lack of or crumbed curbing results in poorly defined roadway edges resulting in a worn and tired perception.
- Deteriorated asphalt curbs present an unmaintained appearance and an overall poor visual image.
- Poor drainage resulting in standing water along roadways, impassable walkways and an unmaintained look.
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B. The City of Hamilton should explore the Construction Industry Council (CIC) and Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE) models and other resources to determine the best way to quantify the economic cost and benefits for buildings and structures.

C. The City of Hamilton should develop and fund a façade improvement grant program.

Landscaping and Streetscapes:

A. The City of Hamilton should explore the Construction Industry Council (CIC) and Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE) models and other resources to determine the best way to quantify the economic cost and benefits of landscaping and streetscapes.

B. The City of Hamilton should review its currents codes and make appropriate modifications for landscaping/streetscaping and signage. These changes should be based on sound economic and environmental data.

Public Space/Environment:

A. The City should actively protect and promote Hamilton's historic and cultural heritage in residential neighborhoods and business districts based on positive visual elements found in local architecture, monuments and open space.

B. The City of Hamilton should explore the Construction Industry Council (CIC) and Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE) models and other resources to determine the best way to quantify the economic cost and benefits of good environmental design and quality public space.

C. The City of Hamilton should adopt LEED concepts and practices into its codes and ordinances.

Transportation/Land Use/Connectivity:

A. The City of Hamilton should review its thoroughfare/transportation plan and determine where upgrades and modifications to the city's transportation infrastructure are needed.

B. The City of Hamilton should research and adopt the most appropriate model(s) that can best calculate the connection between transportation and land use development.

C. The City should adopt regulations that will facilitate design concepts to help integration pedestrian, bicycle, transit and vehicle systems into the city in a way that adds economic and social value to the community.

Housing:

A. The City of Hamilton should understand the desires and needs of the aging baby boomers, and households without children and ensure that residential environments are created to serve this growing sector of the population.

B. Determine what design principles will have the greatest effect on creating sustainable housing for all income levels for the City of Hamilton and adopt these principles into city regulations.

Economic Value of Urban Design:

A. The City of Hamilton should explore the Construction Industry Council (CIC) and Commission for Architecture and Built Environment (CABE) models and other resources to determine the best way to quantify the economic cost and benefits of good urban design.

B. The City of Hamilton should determine which items from the CIC and CABE models and other resources are of the most value to the community and implement these items into the City's codes and regulations.

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